

# Rod building at Hardy 's

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Andrew Herd







# Who am I?

Good question

One reason why I am here is because I am addicted to rods built by Calum and Tom

But the other is that every good thing that wasn't invented by Italians was invented by the British







# What this talk is about

It isn't possible to tell the story of Hardy bamboo without telling the history of Hardy's, so I am going to combine the two

I am not going to go into detail about every single rod the company ever developed, because we have to go home before the end of the week

Like every good story, this one has a beginning, a middle and an end

The end is a ticket to heaven







# 1871

Crisis in Alnwick

John James "coroner" Hardy dies

Leaves a wife (Jane), five sons and two daughters:  
William (1853), John James (1854), Forster (1856),  
Robert Henry (1857), Emma Isabella (1860),  
Charles (1865) and Frances Anne (1866)



# 1872

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William Hardy sets up shop  
as a gunsmith in Paike Street,  
Alnwick, Northumberland so  
that he can help his mother  
support the family

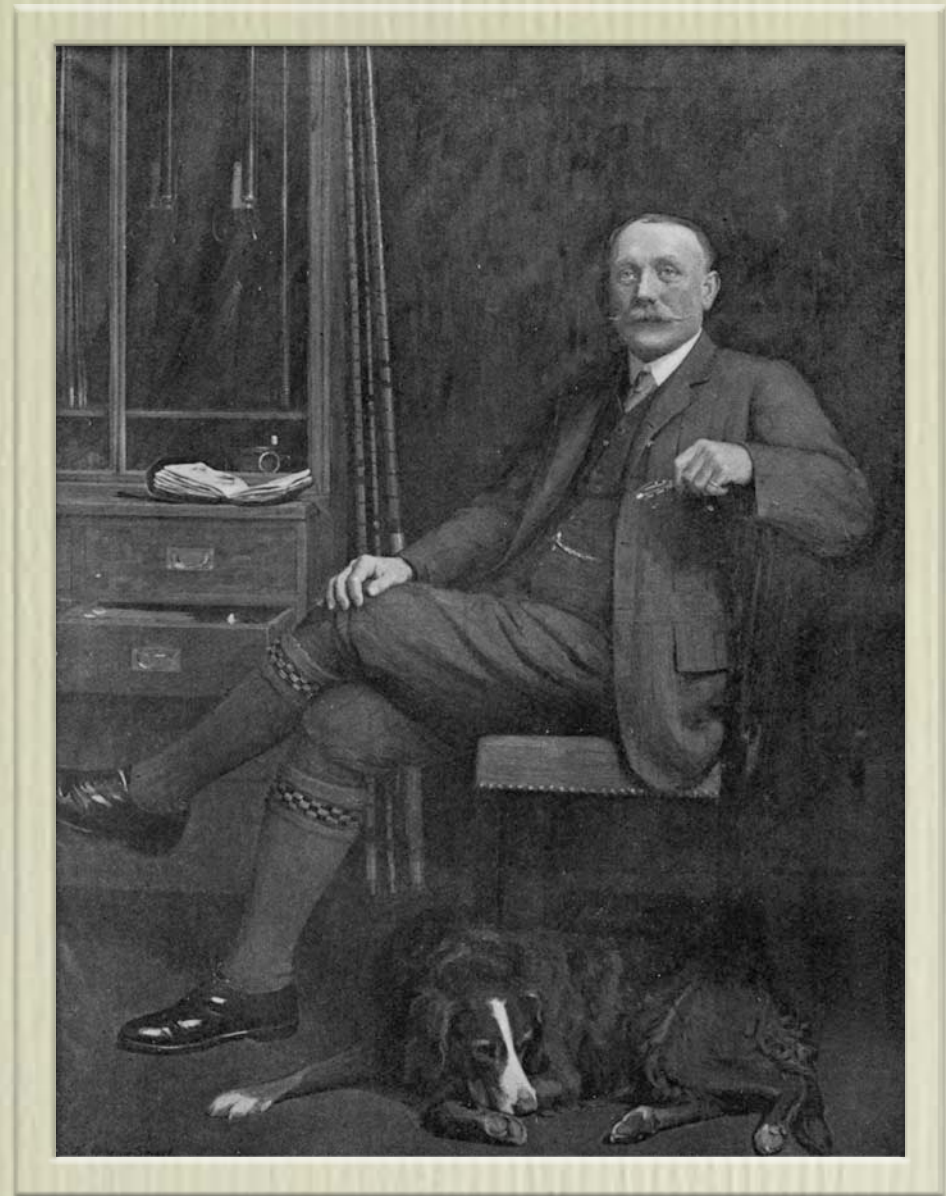




# 1873

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John James joins William as a partner, encouraged by Lord Armstrong. John James was a ship's engineer





# 1874

Hardy Brothers start selling fishing tackle with an advert in the Alnwick Mercury.

Hardy Brothers

Gunsmiths, Paikes Street, Alnwick Invite Anglers to inspect their large and varied stock of superior seasoned Salmon, Trout, and Spinning Rods; Salmon, Lake, and Trout Flies; improved Reels and Lines; Artificial Baits in every variety; superior stout Salmon Marana and extra fine Silkworm Gut. Flies dressed to pattern and sent by post. Live and Preserved Minnows always in Stock. Rods repaired and made to order. Guns repaired and made up as new for next season. Shooting Tackle, Cartridges &c., always in stock. Orders punctually attended to.

Image shows an 1875 Hardy hickory, lancewood and greenheart rod



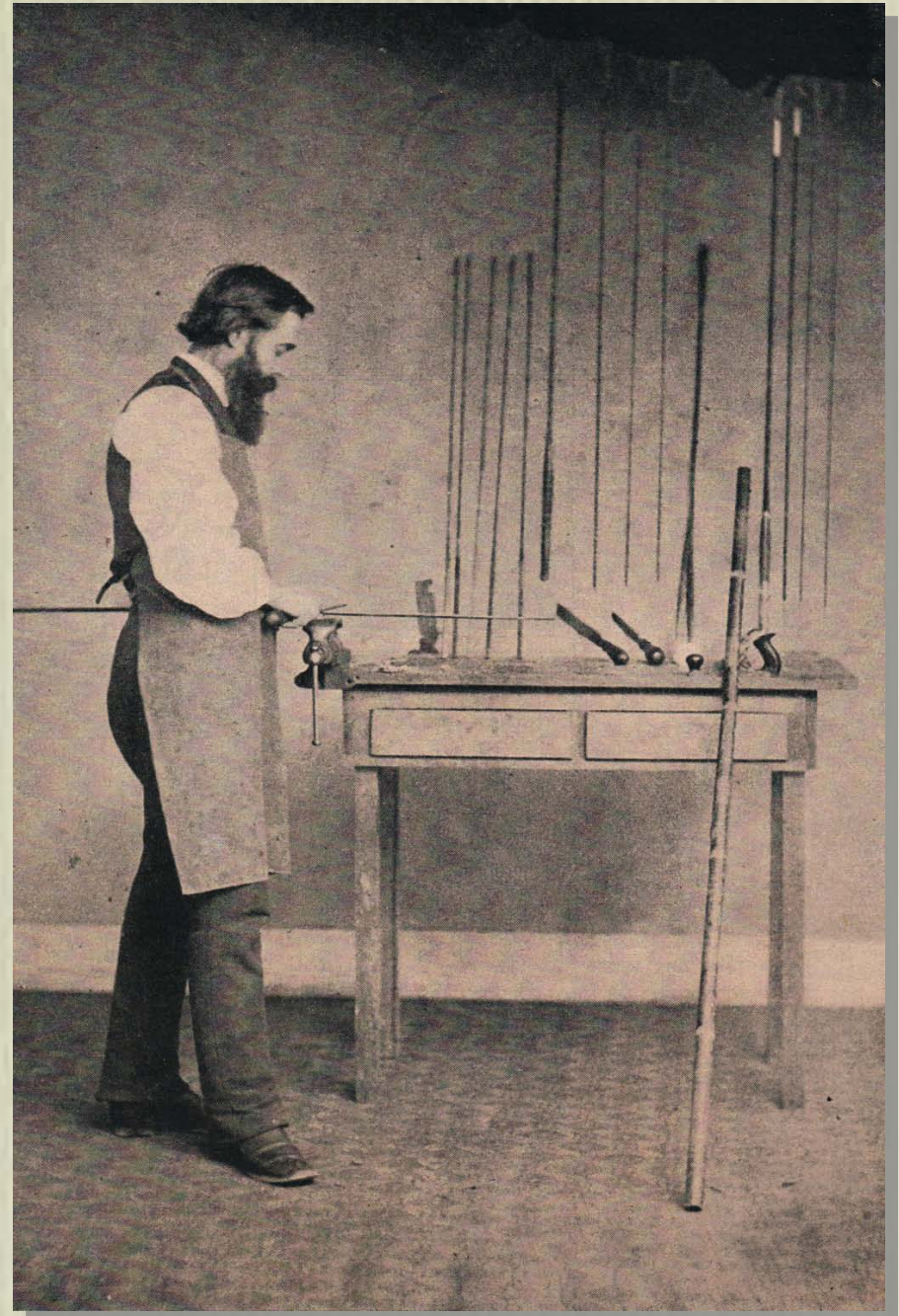


# 1879

William and JJ steam an American hexagonal split bamboo rod apart

Up to this date they have no experience of building in split bamboo

They ask a local cabinet maker if he could make something similar (actually, it was probably something identical...)





# 1881

Hardy patent the Lockfast joint, the first of many patents they will take out on rod fittings

This was an important move, because one of the major differences between Hardy rods and the competition was the quality of the fittings





# 1883

Hardy catalogue shows that they are building two split bamboo rod ranges - the Anglers ' Guide says that they had been 'making them for some years '

Photo is of Great Exhibition rod









# 1882

Weeger reel seat introduced  
and causes confusion for  
Hardy rod collectors for 130  
years because it has a  
number on it...

## HARDY'S REGISTERED "WEEGER" UNIVERSAL WINCH FITTING.

No. 544.

This fitting offers the following advantages:—Great strength, extreme simplicity, and adaptability, as it will take almost any size of reel, from large salmon down to small trout, so no matter what accident happens to your reel, so long as you can find another, for it is sure to fit without any trouble. You never have a shaky reel, and no liability of any stuck rings. They have now been in use nine years, and give every satisfaction. It will be seen from the accompanying wood-cut that the bottom socket **A** is wedge-shaped, and therefore a small reel fits at the bottom, while a larger one will fit

nearer the top. The same principle applies to the locking ring **B**, which is drawn over the reel plate until it grips firmly. Fig. **C** represents the same fitting in a slightly different form. This is the original "Universal" Winch Fitting, given us by our friend, the late Dr. Weeger, of Brunn.

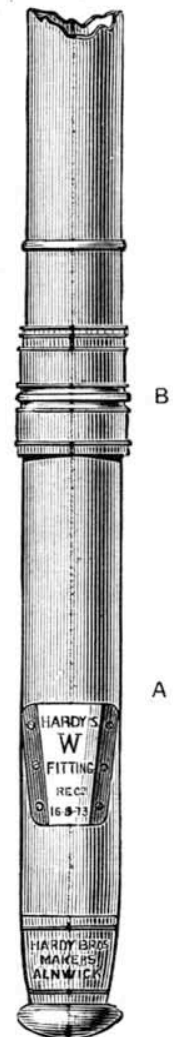
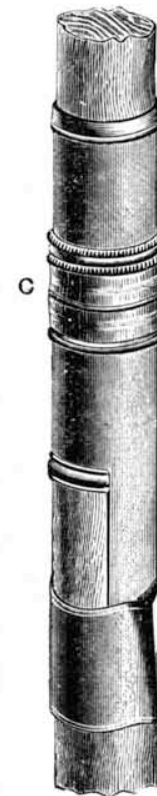
*THE FIELD*, March 31st, 1884.

"HARDY'S PATENT WINCH FITTING.—A very simple but evidently effective winch fitting, of which HARDY BROTHERS, of Alnwick, are the sole proprietors and patentees, has been sent to us. The contrivance may be in a sentence described as the application of a couple of wedges to the bottom and top of the back of the reel. No groove requires to be cut in the rod, and the nuisance of reels that will not fit various rods is obviated. There is no spring to get out of order, and the arrangement, which is called the 'Weeger Universal Reel Fastener,' is simplicity itself."

November 1st, 1885.

MR. H. CHOLMONDELEY-PENNELL, in "Salmon and Trout Fishing," pages 62, 63, and 64, also, in "Pike Fishing," page 22, "Badminton Library," *re* Reel Fittings, says—(of which we only quote a part, as we give our own description of the application)—"I have no hesitation in saying, however, that all the above descriptions of reel fastening are now put completely, and I believe permanently, out of court by one of the cleverest inventions of all those which were submitted to the jurors of the late Fisheries' Exhibition. This is a plan introduced by Messrs. HARDY BROTHERS, of Alnwick. It is simple, inexpensive, absolutely secure, and capable of being adapted to every kind of rod. Moreover, short of applying a heavy salmon reel to a trout rod, this fastening adapts itself to reels of all shapes and sizes." \* \* \*

"I am not, as a rule, a believer in 'finality' in regard to mechanical inventions, but I must say that as the above fastening fulfils every requirement which the most *exigent* can demand, I am really inclined to think for once, in this particular at any rate, fishing tackle has really arrived at perfection."



IN ORDERING FROM THIS LIST PLEASE QUOTE LETTER E.



# Gold Medal rods

Three piece

10 foot to 20 foot

Range stayed in  
production until 1968

Wins prize in Great  
International Fisheries  
Exhibition 1883

## HARDY'S CELEBRATED "GOLD MEDAL" BRAND SPLIT-CANE BUILT RODS,



For SALMON, TROUT, GRAYLING, PERCH,  
MAHSEER, &c.

Guaranteed much superior to any Foreign or other English make.

No.	All in 3 Pieces.	With 1 Top.	With 2 Tops.	Extra per Rod for Lock-joints.	Weight about.
		£ s. d.	£ s. d.	£ s. d.	ozs.
546	10, 10½, 11, 11½, and 12ft.	3 15 0	4 10 0	0 6 6	10 to 12
547	13 feet ...	4 5 0	5 5 0		17
548	14 „ ...	4 10 0	5 10 0	0 8 6	18
549	15 „ ...	5 10 0	6 15 0		25
550	16 „ ...	6 10 0	7 15 0	0 10 6	32
551	17 „ ...	7 10 0	9 0 0		38
552	18 „ ...	8 10 0	10 0 0	0 15 0	42
553	19 „ ...	10 0 0	11 10 0		48
554	20 „ ...	11 10 0	13 10 0		52

Fitted with our Patent Winch Fittings, 544 or 545. Handles either Cedar, Cork, or Pigskin covered and fitted with Ordinary Upright or Spiral Rings. See page 58.

## SAME RODS AS ABOVE, BUT WITH STEEL CENTRES.

No.	All in 3 Pieces.	With 1 Top.	With 2 Tops.	Extra per Rod for Lock-joints.	Weight about.
		£ s. d.	£ s. d.	£ s. d.	ozs.
555	10, 10½, 11, 11½, and 12ft.	4 15 0	5 10 0	0 6 6	10½ to 14
556	13 feet ...	5 10 0	6 10 0		19
557	14 „ ...	5 15 0	6 15 0	0 8 6	25
558	15 „ ...	6 17 6	8 2 6		27
559	16 „ ...	7 17 6	9 2 6	0 10 6	34
560	17 „ ...	9 0 0	10 10 0		40
561	18 „ ...	10 0 0	11 10 0	0 15 0	45
562	19 „ ...	11 12 6	13 2 6		52
563	20 „ ...	13 2 6	15 2 6		56

Fitted with our Patent Winch Fittings. Handles and Rings as above.



# Perfection rod

- Almost certainly a copy of an American rod
- 10 foot two piece
- 12 foot to special order
- Stays in production until 1971
- Also wins prize at exhibition



# 1885

- 17 more rod ranges go into production
- 8 are split bamboo
- Include 'portmanteau' four piece split bamboo fly rods







# The traveling angler

Long rods did not make  
you many friends in  
stagecoaches and trains  
weren't much better





# 1885 approx

Hardy put double-built salmon rods into production, with option of steel centres

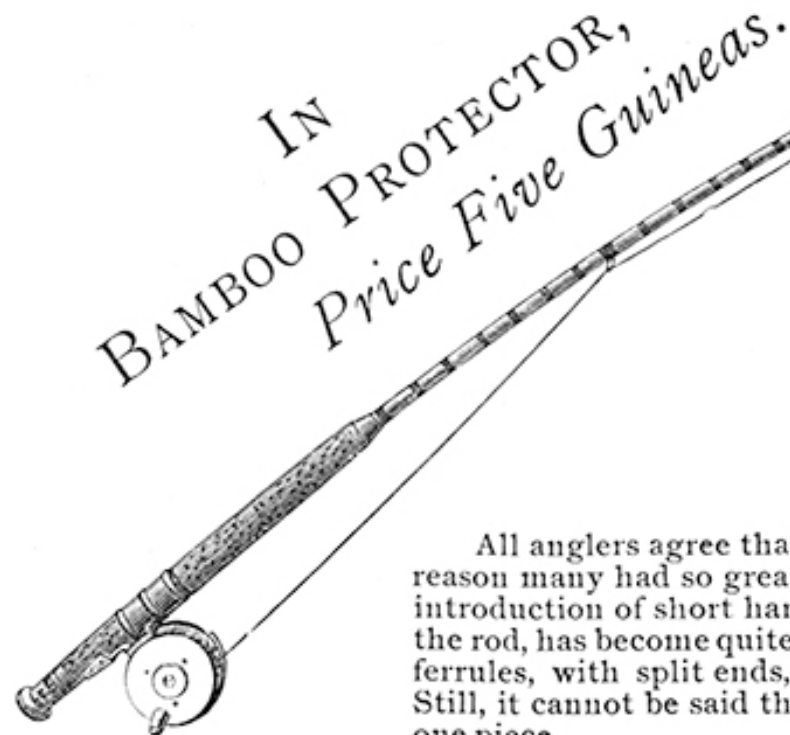
Jim Hardy 's book not completely reliable on this point

H.S. Hall 10 foot 6 inch 3 piece rod with cork covered handle a good example of what Hardy ' s were building at the time - cost £4 10s and stayed in production until 1921



# 1885 to 1939

IN ORDERING FROM THIS LIST PLEASE QUOTE LETTER S.



IN  
BAMBOO PROTECTOR,  
Price Five Guineas.

## THE "IDEAL" TROUT ROD,

Built of "PALAKONA" Bamboo (Regd.).

All anglers agree that the fewer the joints in a rod the better, and for this reason many had so great an affection for the old spliced rod, which since the introduction of short hard ferrules, carefully gauged to spring in unison with the rod, has become quite a thing of the past. Any of our rods fitted with patent ferrules, with split ends, are better and much more convenient than a splice. Still, it cannot be said that theoretically, a jointed rod is as perfect as a rod in one piece.

Made from 9 to 11 ft. long in one perfect piece of built cane. Weight 6½ to 9 ozs.

This is a very perfect article, and, where rods can be kept full length, a very beautiful tool to work with. Fitted with Cork Handle, Patent "Universal" Winch Fittings, "Bridge" Rings, Agate or Revolving Gold-plated steel butt and end rings, Five Guineas. If with steel centre, Six Guineas.

*The Field.*—"A specimen of superb workmanship."

The ten foot rod you built for me in one piece is absolutely perfect and very powerful, I can cast further with it than with any other rod.

The "Ideal" is simply perfect, and in over 35 years of angling and owning some 25 rods, I can safely say this one is the best. It is very light, yet powerful, and is the envy of my angling friends who have seen it. I have to thank you very much for carrying out my order so carefully and promptly.

Dear Sir,

Now that I am returning after the "May Fly" season, I feel it is due to you to say how very pleased I am with the (in every sense) "Ideal" rod you built me this spring. It is surprising how so very light a rod can have such power in casting, and also, in so quickly overcoming a hard fighting fish.

CATSFIELD HOUSE.

P. R. NAPIER.

DULVERTON.

B. C. MARSHALL.

BOTLEY, HANTS.

L. DUYER, Col.



# 1886

10 more rods added to catalogue

7 are split bamboo, including Kelson salmon rod  
(18 foot three piece, two tops, suction joints,  
Weeger reel seat, £10 11s, Lockfast joints extra)

## THE "KELSON" SALMON ROD.

581½—

66



*Round at  
the top of handle  
Handle in ferrule*

*Revolving Rings Small. Top Ring Steel Revolving Hook Upside*

17½ ft. 18 ft. All Cane built in 3 pieces, 2 tops, Cork or Pigskin covered handle, Suction Joints, "Universal" Winch-fitting, No. 544. Revolving Phosphor Bronze Rings, Weight 46 ozs., India Rubber Butt end. Price £10 11s. 6d. Lock-fast Joints, ~~10s. 6d. extra.~~ 15/-

The above is specially designed by GEO. M. KELSON, Esq., "Salmon Angling" Editor of *Land and Water*, and *Fishing*. It has stout tops with great lifting power in middle, and full swing in butt; it will execute all the various casts, and is simply casting made easy, as it will cast a long line simply by the action of the rod alone.

SIRS,

I beg to inform you that I gave the rod a good trial whilst I was in the North, fishing the rivers Tay and Lyon. The whole time I was there the weather was extremely rough and boisterous. "The ill wind," however, will blow you no harm, for after working the rod for several days to my complete satisfaction it showed no signs of distress whatever. I mention this particularly, as you are aware that I use a very long line when it is necessary, and nothing tries a rod more than making the "wind cast" with it.



# 1886 - 1897

The first, and I  
very much hope  
the last, telescopic  
split bamboo rod -  
remember that  
Hardy Brothers  
thought of it first!

180

HARDY BROTHERS,

## 576— **THE “REDSPINNER” ROD.**

(HARDY'S PATENT, No. 1127.)



### *FIELD.*

“THE REDSPINNER ROD.—Is of built-cane, and fitted with all the latest improvements, which are applied by this firm to their justly celebrated rods. But it has two specialities. The first is a telescope arrangement, by which the rod can be lengthened from 9 ft. 6 in. to 10 ft. 6 in. The difference does not appear to be great, but every angler knows how much more work can at critical times be got out of an extra foot of casting power. The butt has one of those cork handles of about 18 in. long, which have of late years been applied to the built-cane rods, and it is in this that the extra length is made to slide. At the point where the handle ceases, and the comparatively slender continuation of the piece commences, there is a nozzle, which screws tightly down to a chuck in three detached sections, and these when the screw is worked, close round the telescopic length securely and neatly. Three turns of the screw release the extra foot length, which may be drawn half out, or not, as required, and screwed up with ease. We have given the rod a downright hard day's work, and like it immensely. At first it seems as if the handle arrangement produced a dead action towards the butt; but the length of straight line that may be got out, even by the 9 ft. 6 in. rod, is astonishing. The workmanship of the rod is, it need scarcely be said, perfect; and there is one other speciality which Messrs. HARDY, after a good deal of trouble, have accomplished, namely, a dull varnish. This is a real improvement, and the dark green colour is an improvement also. The rings are stand-up and revolving.”



# 1889

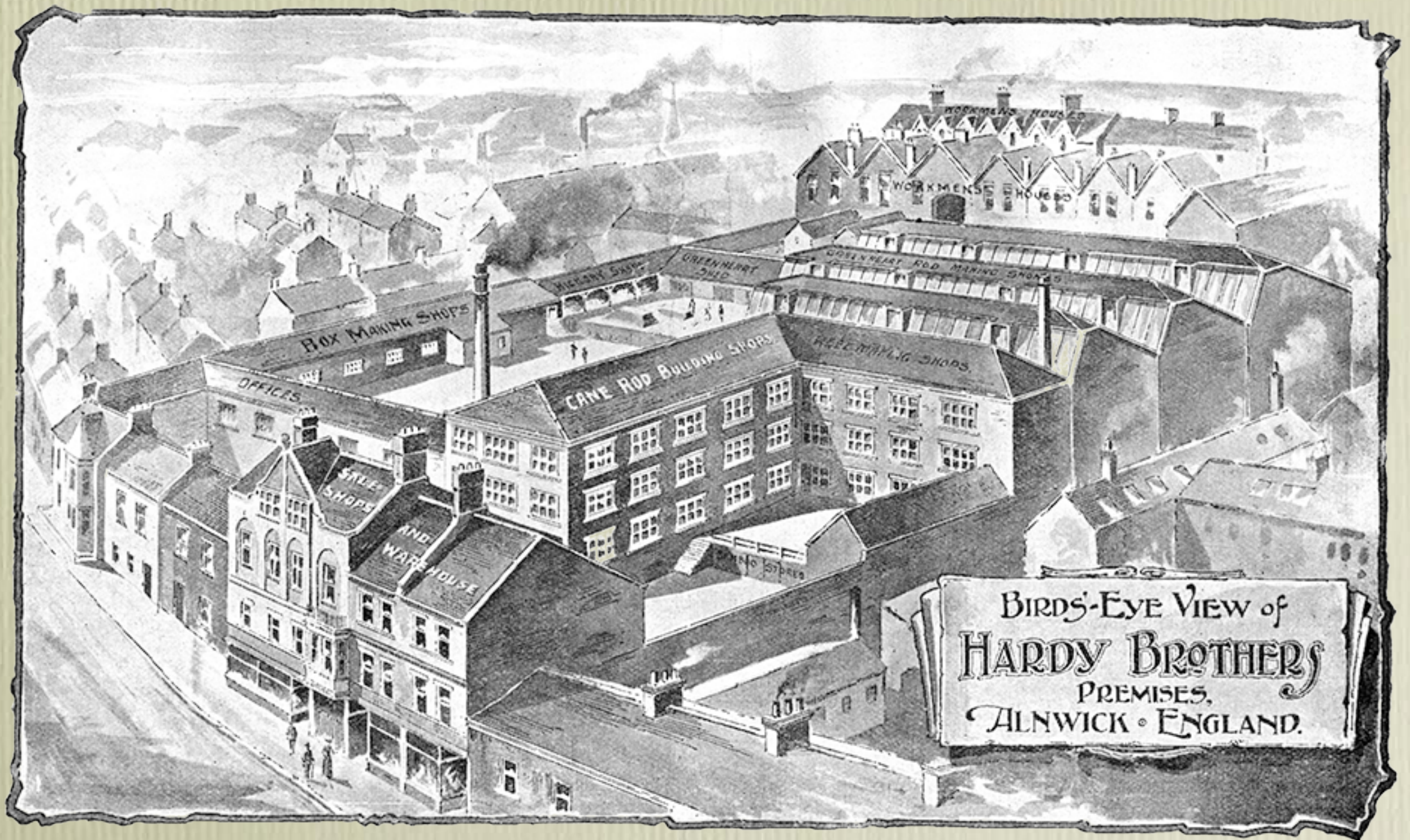
Hardy 's patent rod spear attachment introduced

Now their clients can accidentally stab themselves while fishing





1890









1891

The Perfect reel  
goes on sale

It still is





# 1892

Hardy 's attended every exhibition they could in the early days

This rod was built in 1892 and exhibited in 1898 in Paris













# 1891

7 more rod ranges  
added

3 split bamboo

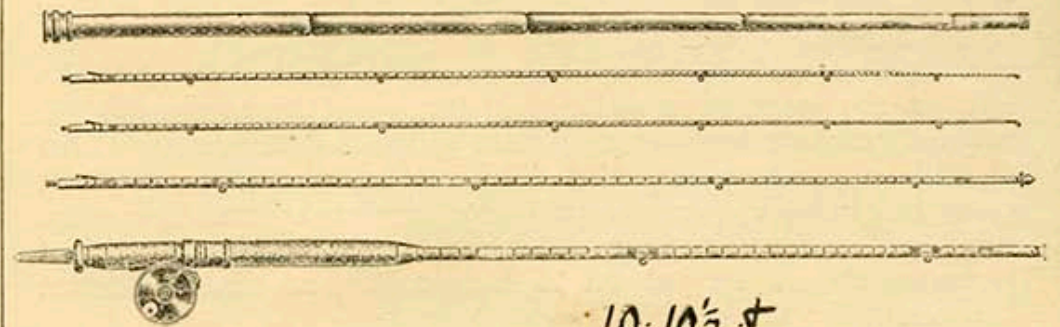
Include Houghton Dry  
Fly rod, with special  
catalogue

## SUPPLEMENT TO CATALOGUE C.

### THE "HOUGHTON" SPECIALITIES.

IN introducing these new goods, we may state that altho' we have for years past been in the habit of making and using special rods and other articles, adapted for the dry fly fisher; still it was thought that, up to date, no competent firm had ever made the subject an especial study in order to satisfy the needs of the present advanced school of dry fly fishers. We, therefore, sent a member of our firm, an expert in rod and tackle making, and an accomplished fisherman, to make a study of the requirements, with the kind assistance of some of the best anglers of the day. The result is, that without doubt, we are enabled to produce a class of goods specially suitable for this work, which are much in advance of anything hitherto made.

#### No. 546 H.—THE "HOUGHTON" DRY FLY ROD.



Built from specially selected bamboo, 11ft., in three pieces, two Tops, Cork covered Handle, Patent Lock-fast Joints, "Reversible combined" Spear and Button, "Bridge" Rings—Close tied—with Bamboo Top Case.—5 Guineas.

The balance—Specially heavy tops and stout middle, with a free quick action in butt. The rod is very powerful, and would also do well for sea trout or small grilse.

IN ORDERING FROM THIS LIST PLEASE QUOTE LETTER C



# 1893-1894

Shops open in Edinburgh and Manchester



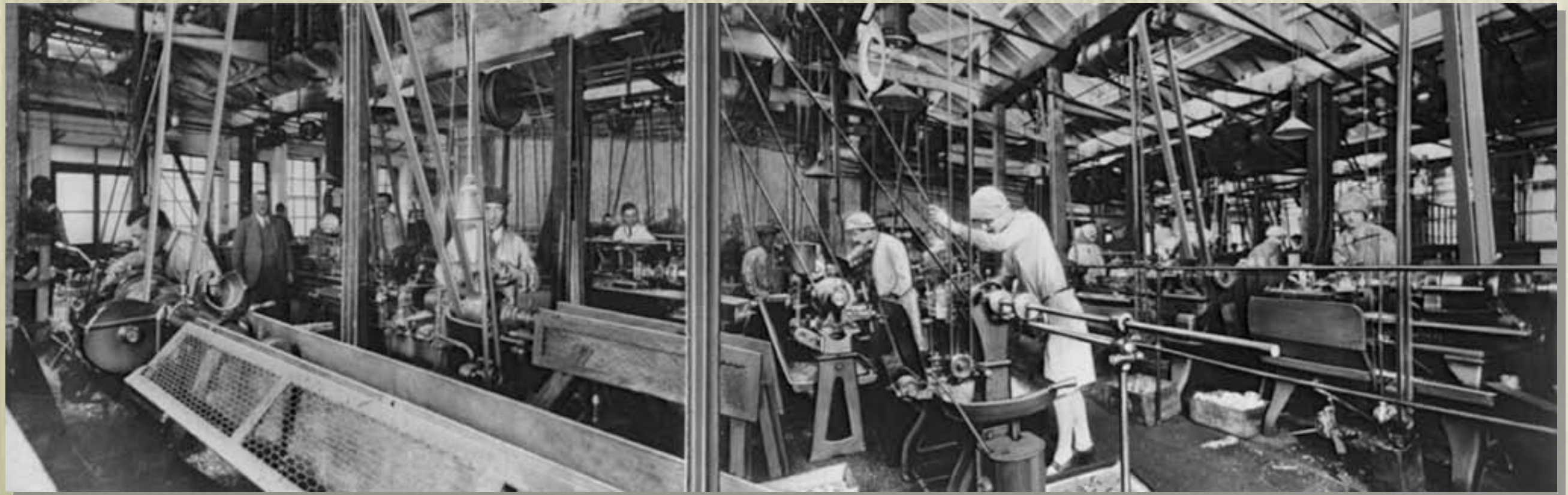


# 1894

27 more rod ranges added

10 of these are split bamboo

Range continues to expand





# 1895

Hardy's publish test data on the behaviour of their rods

The brothers are practical engineers and seek to build the best and then improve on it

raised to the level of the rod and secured by a catch; when all was in readiness the detent was released, the weight fell for a distance of 12 inches, the drawing board moved along under influence of the weight, and the pencil at the extremity of the rod indicated in a graphic manner the vibrations of the specimen under test, and showed by the depth of the first vibration the resilience or proof load, of the piece, and at the finish of its undulations recorded by a straight line the dead load deflection caused by a weight of 1 lb. hanging at a distance of 18 inches.

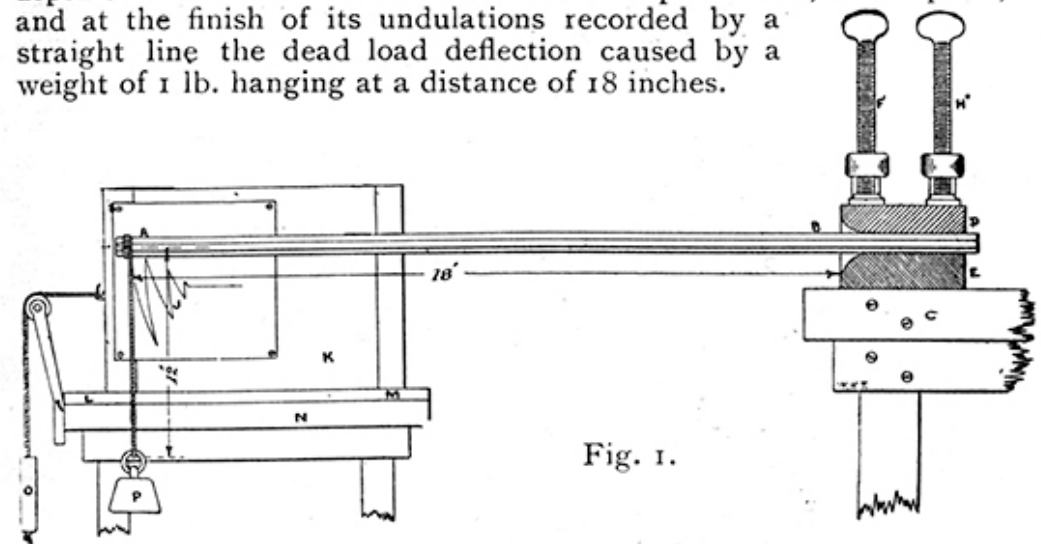


Fig. 1.

This was done two or three times with each kind of rod, and the clearest curve chosen as the indication of that specimen. The example given in Fig. 2 is the curve obtained from rod No. 2. The

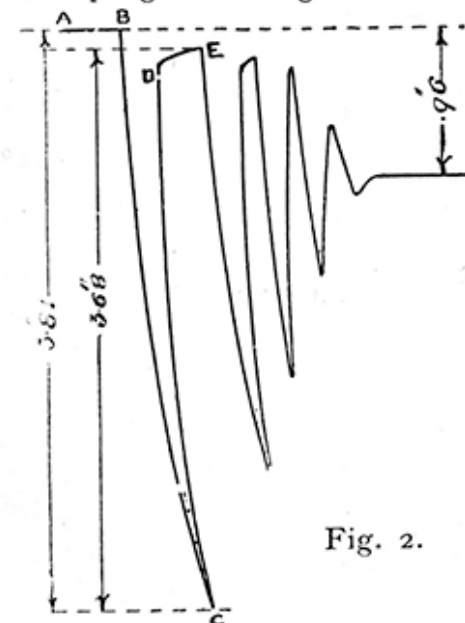


Fig. 2.

line A B is the line drawn by the pencil when the rod was at rest, at B the falling weight took effect, and the end of the rod was deflected for a distance of 3.81 inches, the recovery is shown by the curve C D, which in this case does not reach the zero line A B, the straighter portion D E is formed by the upward movement of the weight continuing after the rod has almost recovered itself, and is shown rising to E. This indicates the endeavour of the rod to return to its original position; but before it can do so the weight again falls, and so the wavy line is drawn, until the rod remains at rest under its dead load deflection.

The numerical analysis of all these curves is given in the tabulated statement hereafter. (Page 169).

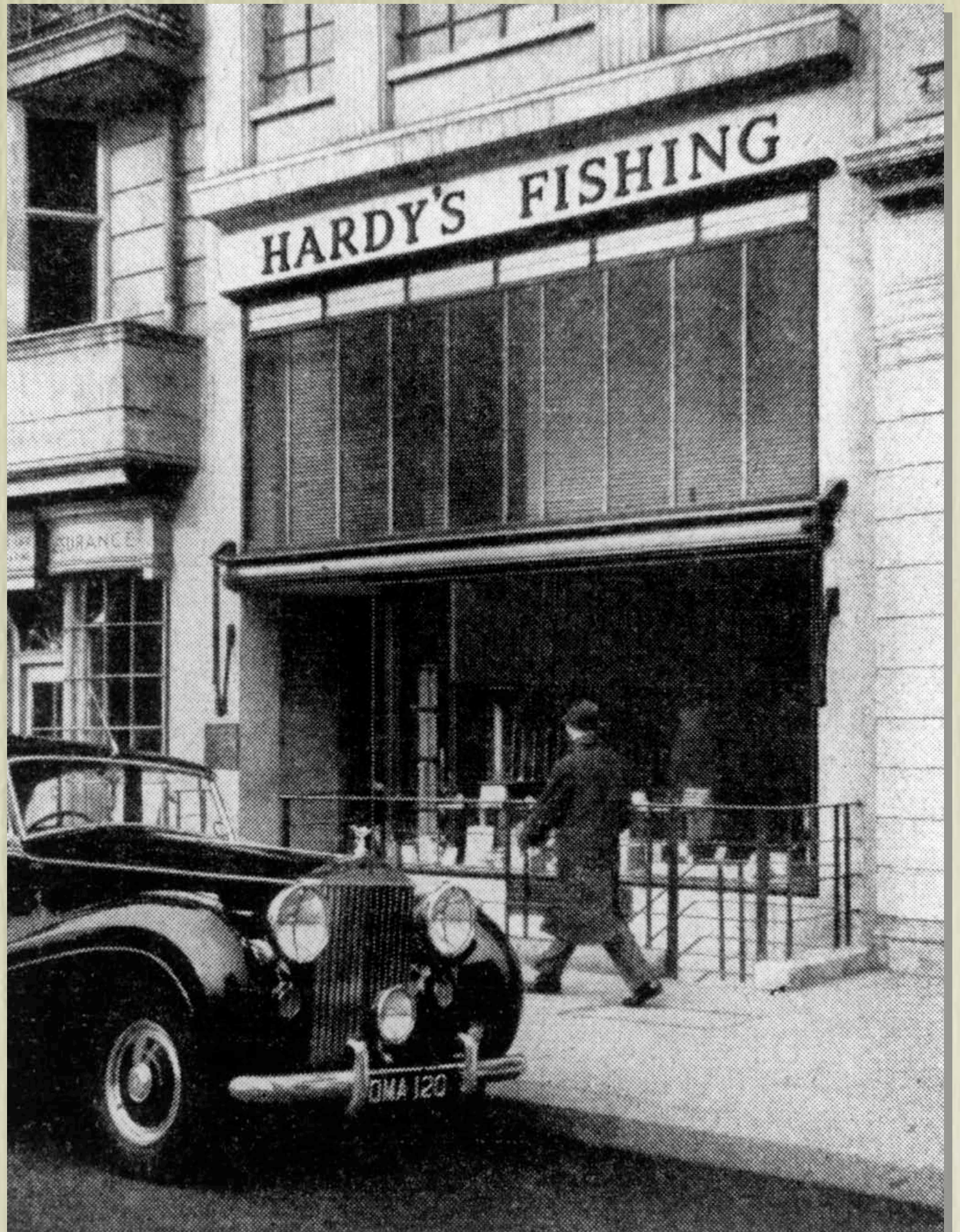
The next test was similar to the above, only substituting a two pound weight in place of one pound, everything else being the same. At first sight it might be imagined that the deflection for 2lb. would be twice that for one pound; but this is not so, the nature of the various woods prohibiting this. For instance, when No. 9 was tested 1 lb.



# 1897

Pall Mall shop  
opens in London

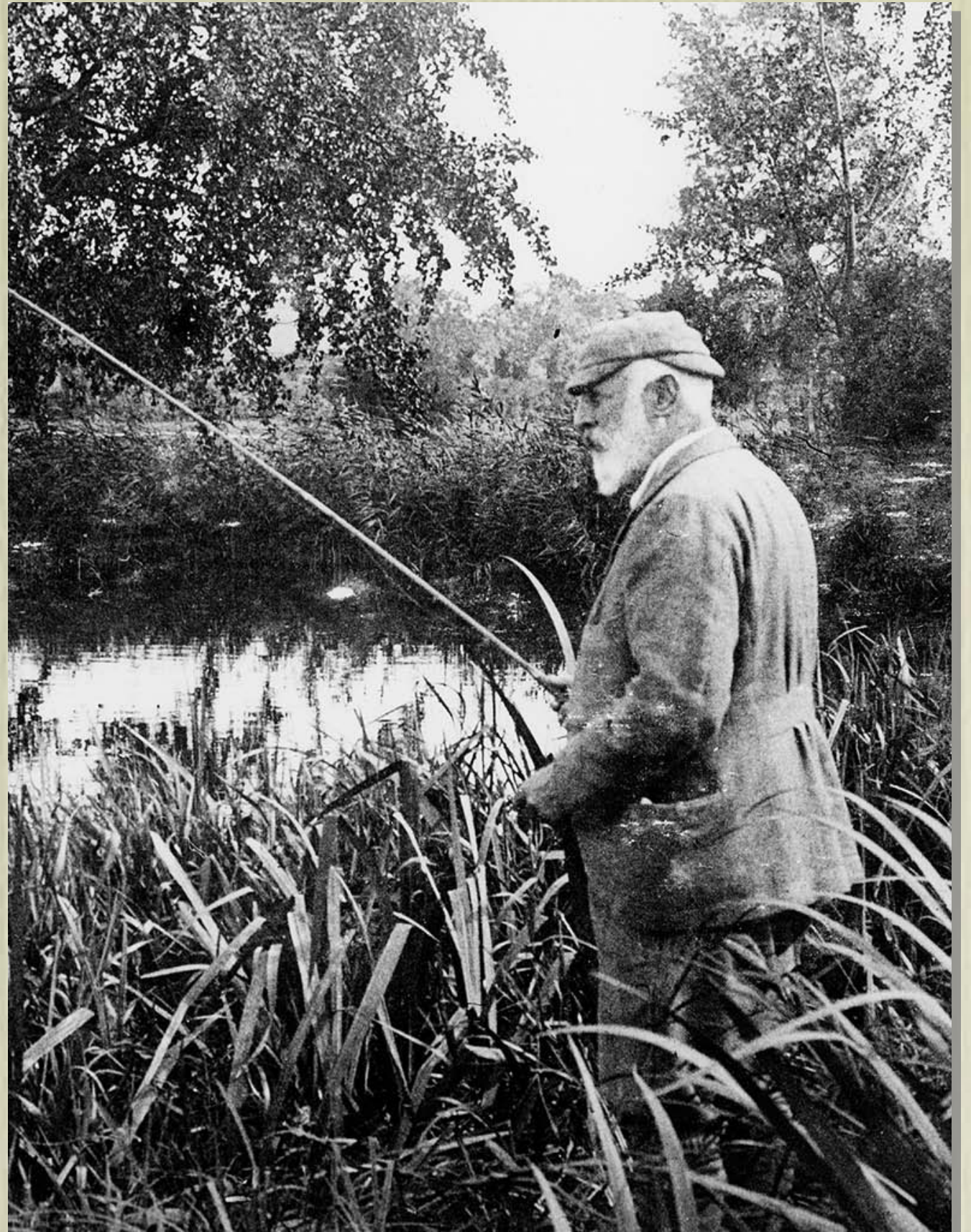
Forster Hardy runs  
it and goes to see  
King George V  
every year to show  
off the new range





# 1897

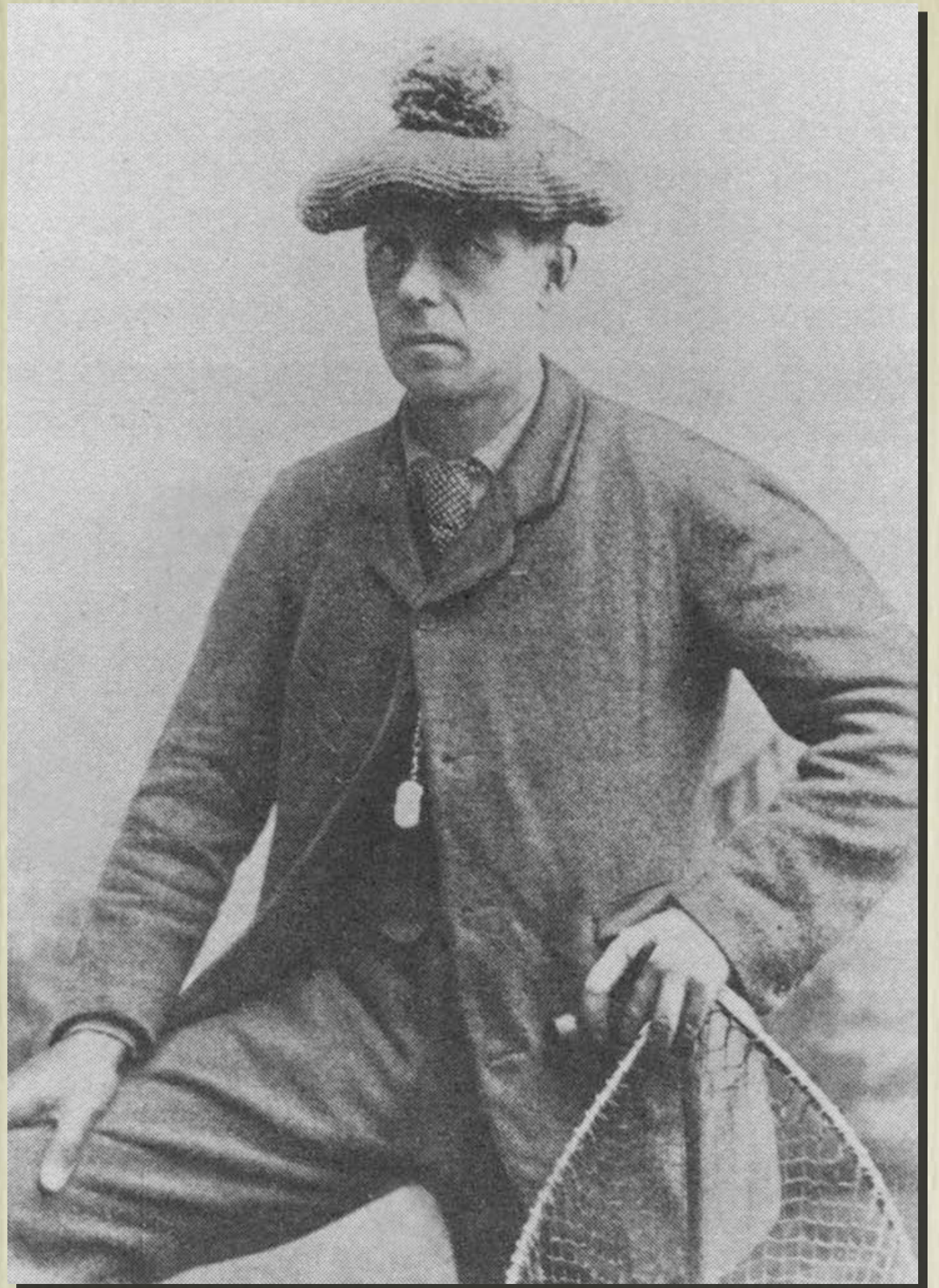
Production of  
Halford 'Priceless'  
10 foot 3 inch rod  
begins. This was a  
copy of an Eaton &  
Deller rod and the  
name was given to it  
by George Marryat





# 1897

Perfect Test rod  
approved by  
Marryat - probably  
also a copy of  
another company's  
rod





# 1899

Hardy's build 1083  
split bamboo rods

Paris exhibition  
prize rod shown









# 1900

Lawrence Robert  
(L.R.) Hardy joins  
the company

He will play a big  
role in the  
company's future

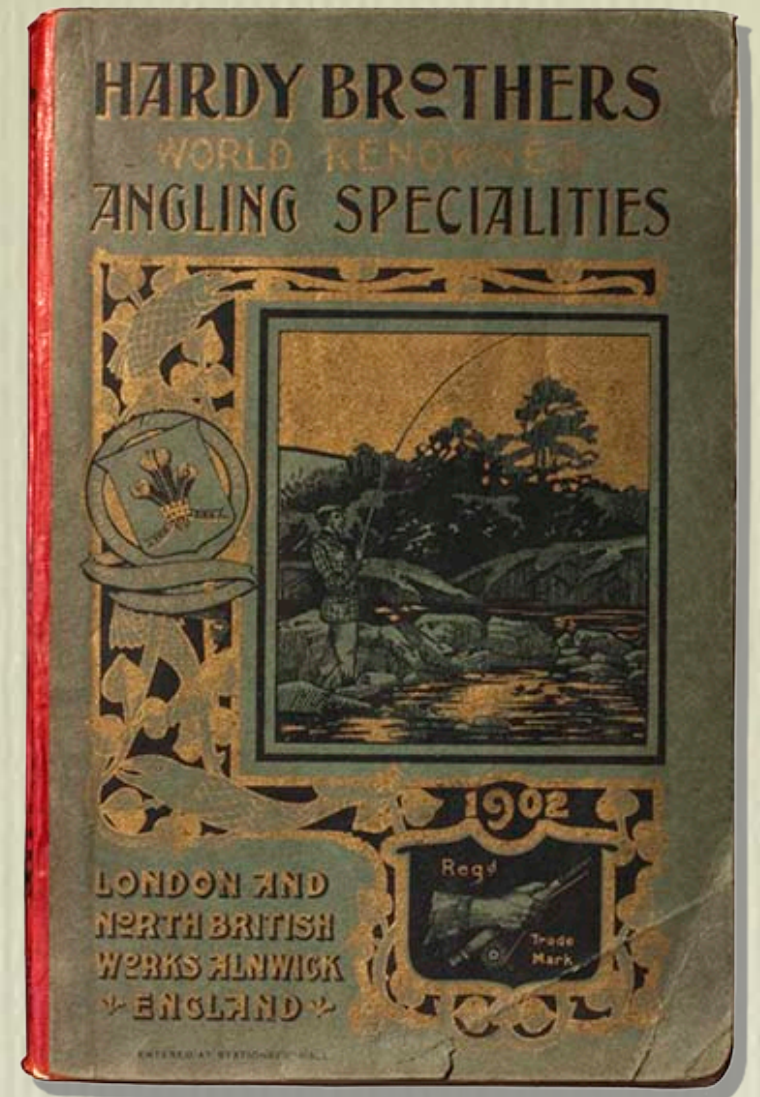




# 1902

Palakona name registered

Rod shown is early 10 foot 6  
inch Palakona with leather  
covered handle





# 1903

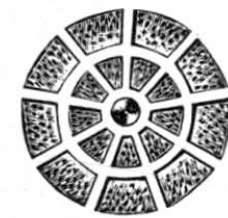
Hardy making  
many rod  
ranges

Single built

Double built

Steel centres

Hexagonal, octagonal,  
nonagonal



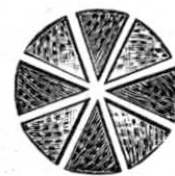
BEFORE CEMENTING.

## **“Nonagonal” Sections.**

DOUBLE BUILT.



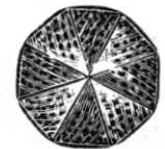
AFTER CEMENTING.



BEFORE CEMENTING.

## **“Octagonal” Sections.**

SINGLE BUILT.



AFTER CEMENTING.

FOR “NONAGONAL” & OCTAGONAL” RODS SEE PAGE 227, 207.



# 1907

Partnership becomes a limited company and William and JJ appointed joint managing directors

Rod is a 1905 Halford 9 foot 6 with hexagonal butt and pentagonal top.





# 1910

Hardy built several lines of 'composite' rods, like this one, the 'GCS'. The reel was built in about 1922





# 1911

Casting Club de France rod listed

Hardy now promoting a lightweight range

Rod shown is J.J. 's 6 foot 6 inch CC de France





# 1911 salmon rods

16 foot 'Special salmon' three piece shown





# Lightweight rods

In 1911 the range included:

CC de France, Fairchild, Fairy, Gem Featherweight  
& Featherweight Perfection

Weights varied between 4 1/2 and 6 ozs

Adding Lockfast joints and a spear added another 1  
3/4 oz to the weight



# Women ' s rods

Hardy made several rod ranges specifically for women, for example the Princess shown here, which dates from 1906

Others included the Princess Mary and the Victoria







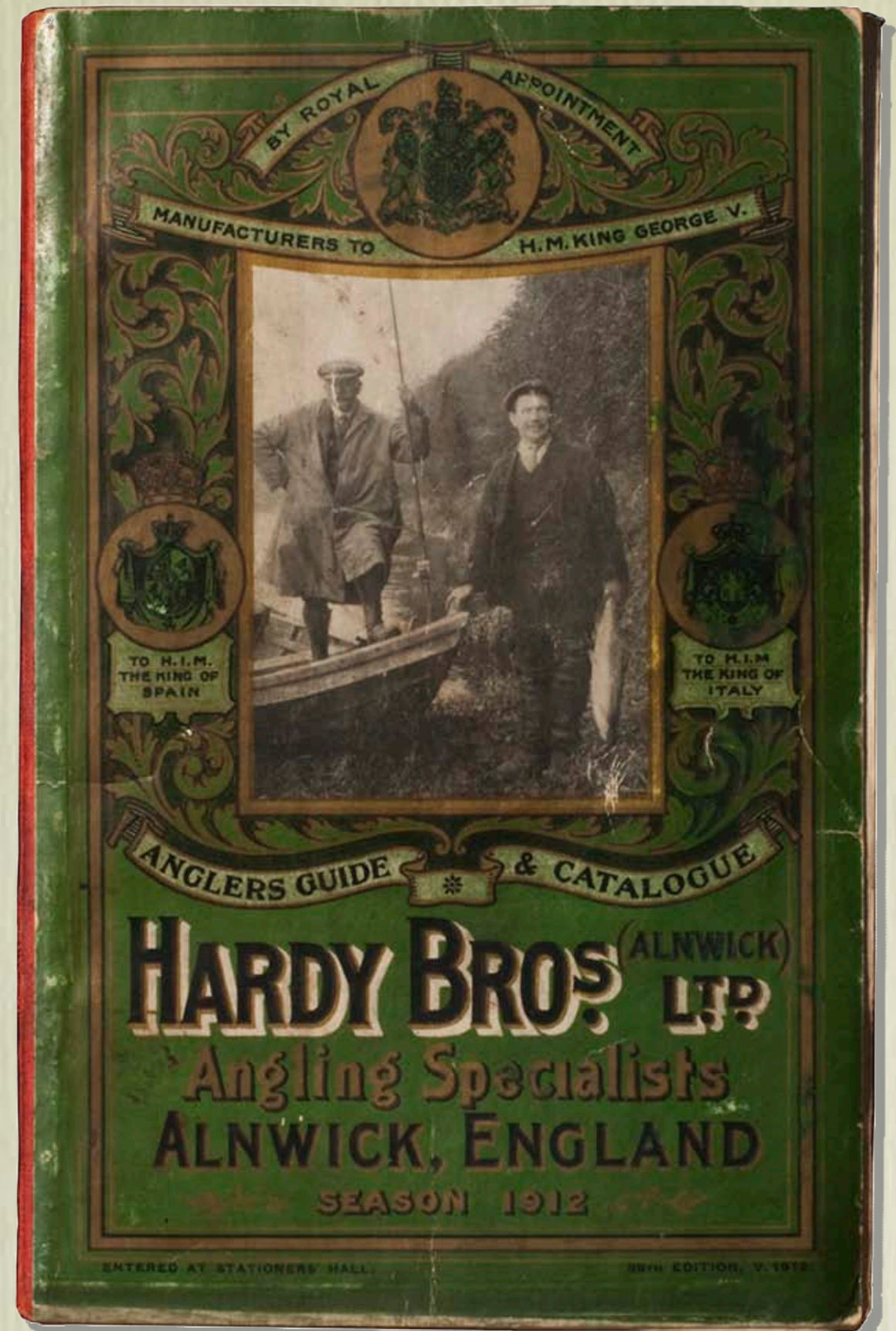


# 1912

Agent appointed in New York

Hardy's would steadily add agents until they were taking orders from all over the world

Now making 2000+ split bamboo rods a year



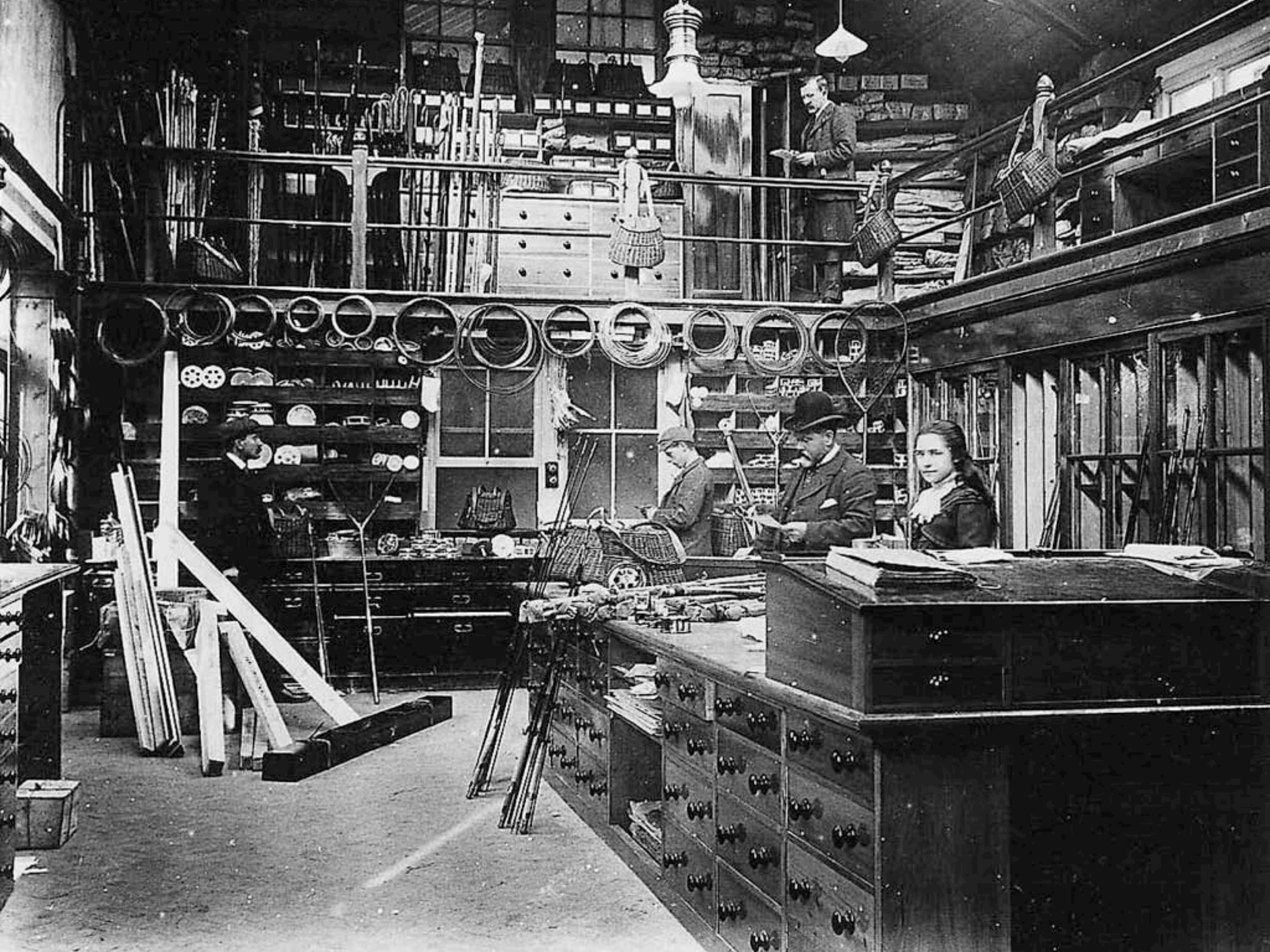


# 1913

William Hardy retires

J. J. and L. R. become joint managing  
directors







# 1914

War!

Hardy 's release 3 more rods in 1915

No more new rods for four years

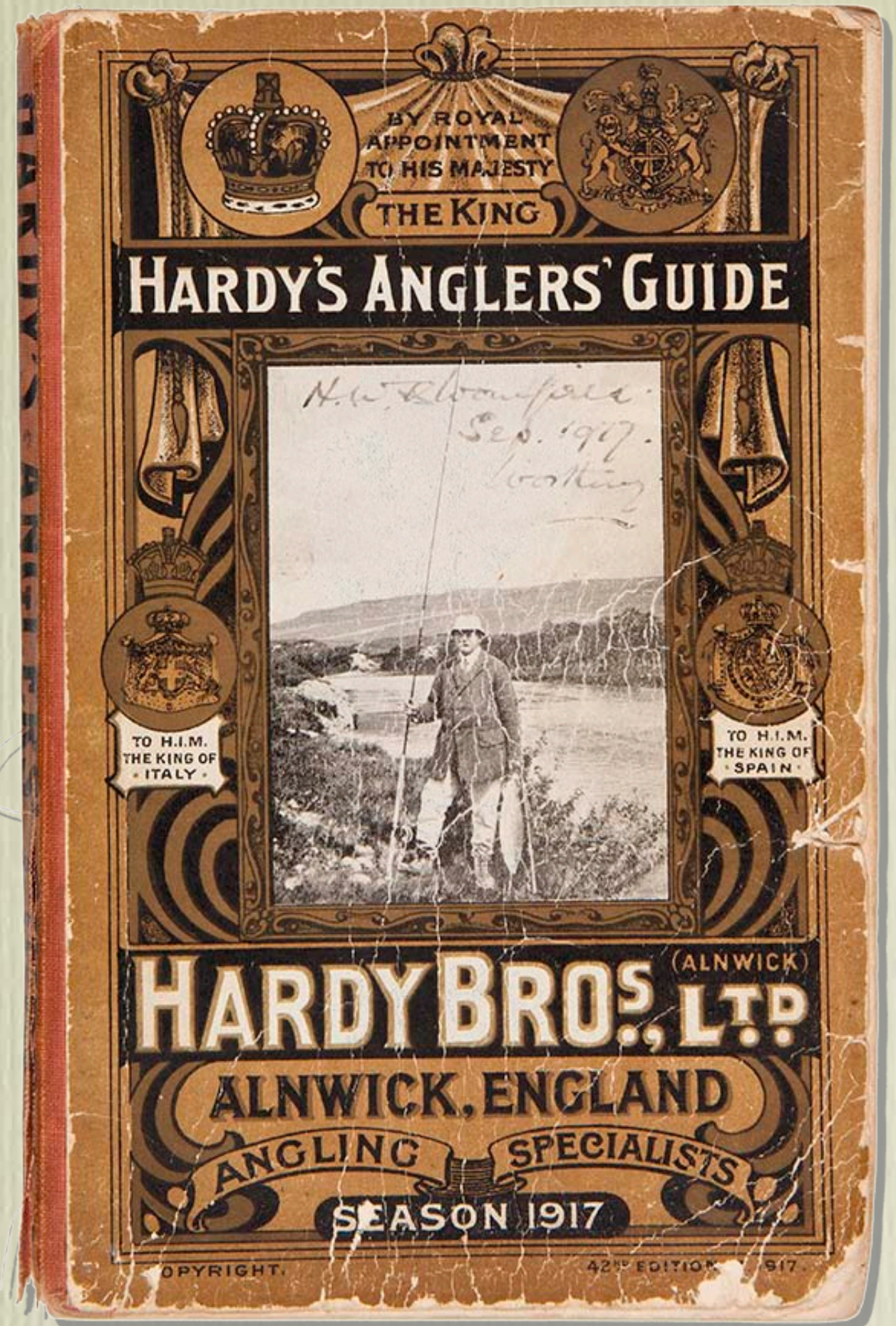


# 1917

William Hardy dies

Hardy stop referring  
to 'split-cane',  
having discovered that  
bamboo is a grass

None of their British  
customers read this





# 1918

Production falls back to  
1200 rods per annum

Hardy Houghton cast  
case shown

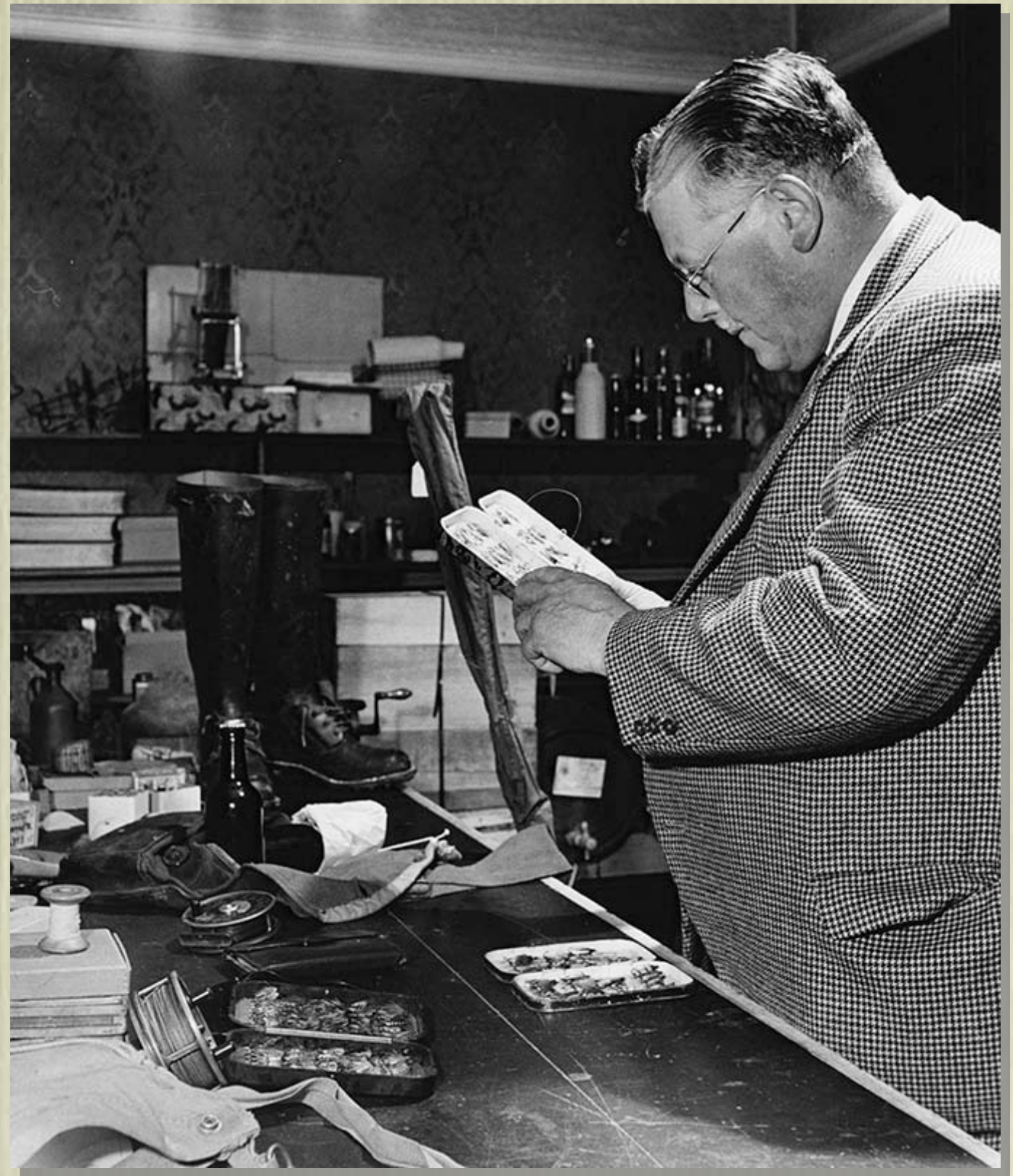




# 1920

J.J. Hardy retires and  
L.R. continues as  
sole managing  
director

Although Hardy  
continue to build  
rods, the rate of  
innovation slows





# 1922

William Hardy II becomes joint managing director  
with L.R. Hardy

Hardy ' s begin a slow climb back into profitability



# 1922

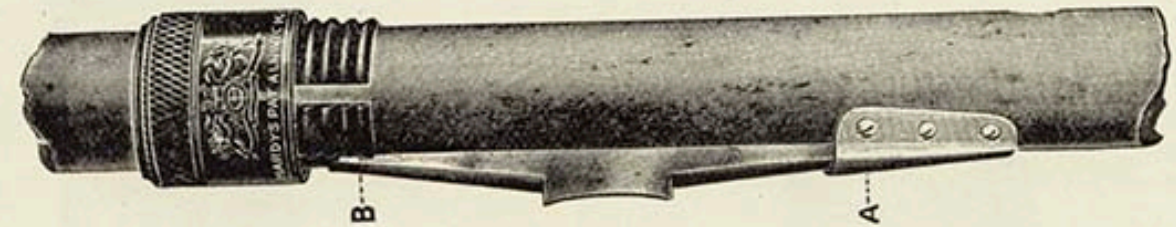
Hardy's patent screw  
reel seat

This fitting was still  
being used in the  
1980s

## Hardy's "Screw Grip" Reel Fitting

AS APPLIED TO DOUBLE-HANDED RODS.

(Patent No. 20875—1922).



This is undoubtedly one of the greatest of recent improvements in fishing rod fittings. Almost every angler, at some time or other, has had his reel drop off at a critical moment. When using this improved fitting, it is not possible for this to occur. As may be seen from the illustration, the usual locking ring, instead of having a plain surface, is provided with a substantial internal screw, so that by turning, it travels up or down on the reel plate and securely grips it.

**To fix the Reel.**—Hold the slide by the part shown threaded, and screw back the locking ring until the thread is exposed as shown, and the chase in slide is in line with A. Put one end of the reel back into A, and lay the other end into the chase as shown at B. Pull down the ring and slide over the reel back, as far as you can; then give the locking ring a few turns, when all is secure. To release reel—unscrew ring and push up ring and slide.

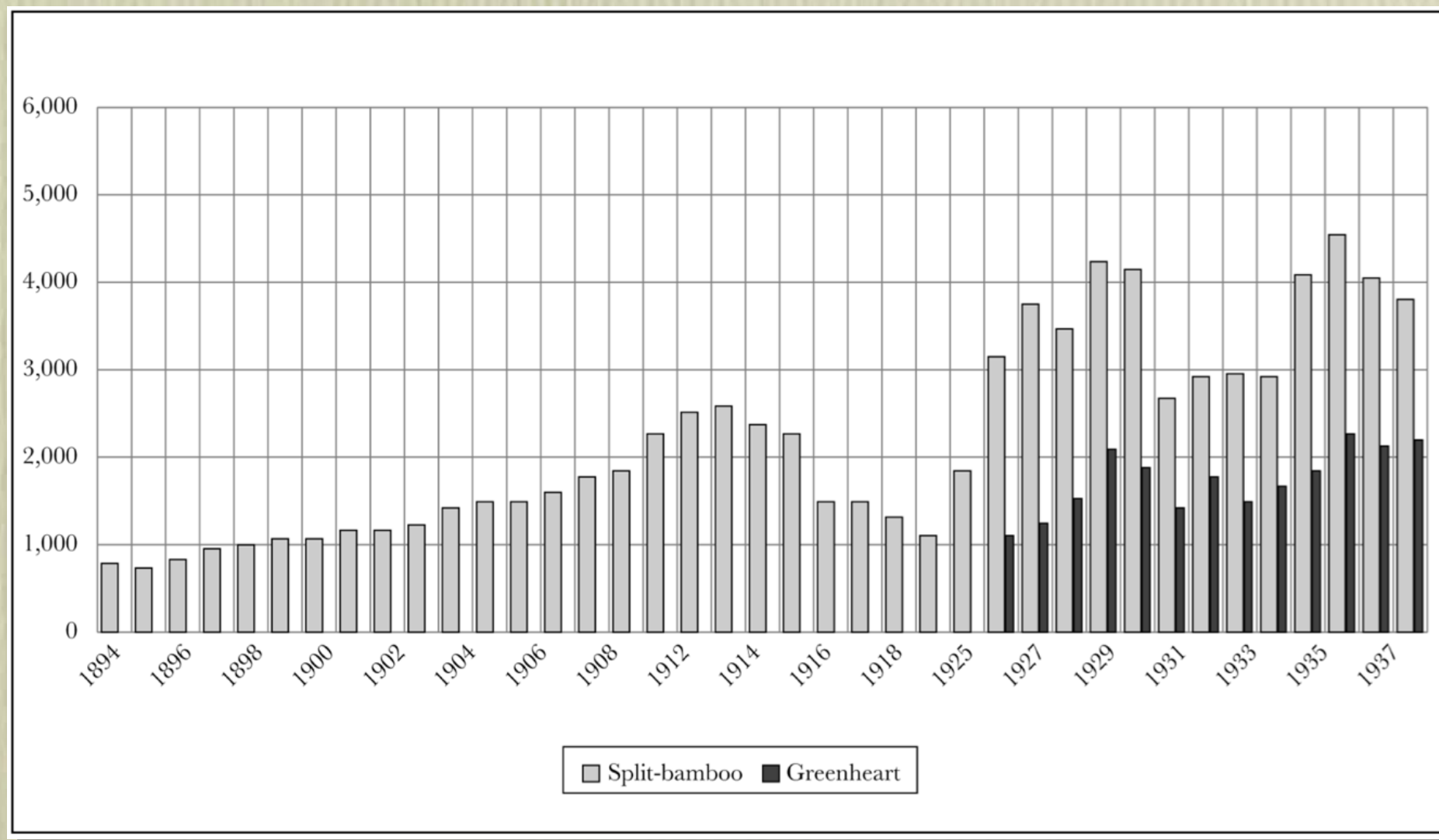
Price to rods 12 ft. to 18 ft., 6/6 extra.

This fitting is also used on sea or casting rods, and also trout rods when used for fly and occasional spinning, where it is desirable to remove the reel into different positions on the handle. In this case an extra slide and locking ring are substituted for A. Price for double fitting, 12/6.



# 1926

Hardy making 3000 split bamboo rods a year



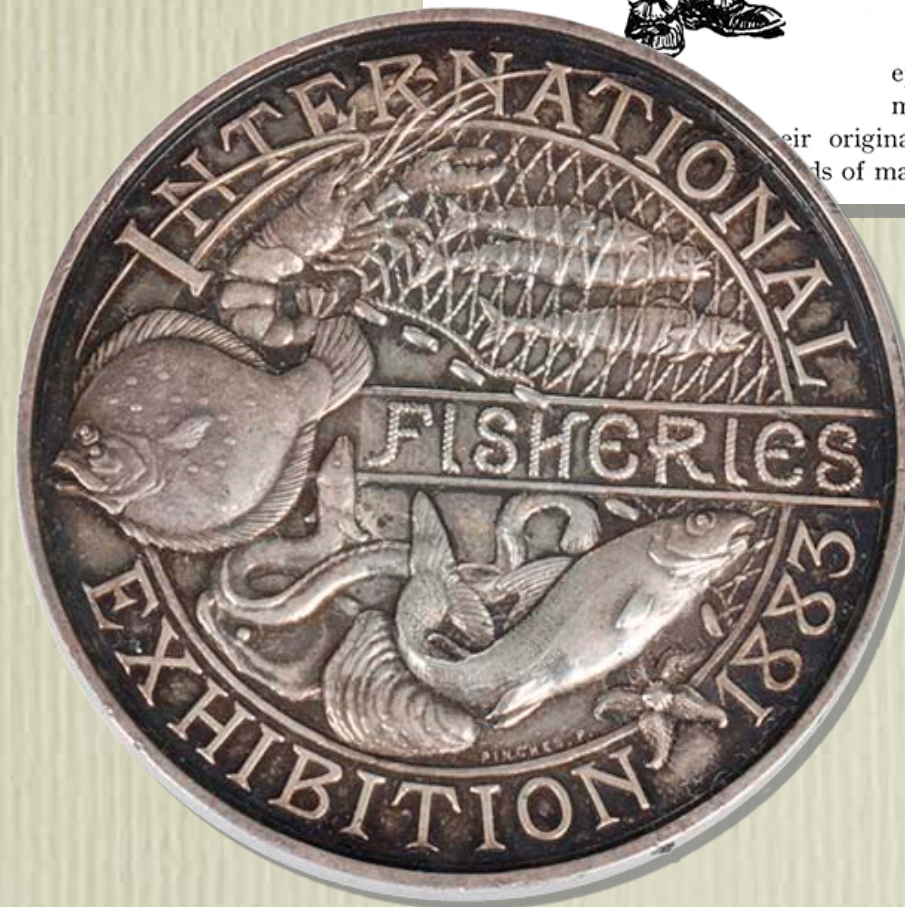


# 1928

William Hardy II dies

L.R. continues as sole  
M.D.

Hardy 's claim to have  
invented system of six  
strip bamboo in 1882!



198 HARDY BROTHERS LIMITED

To the King

IN the year 1882 Messrs. Hardy Bros. invented the system of building fishing rods in hexagonal form from bamboo. For this the Gold Medal was awarded at the  
GREAT FISHERIES EXHIBITION,  
LONDON, 1883-4.



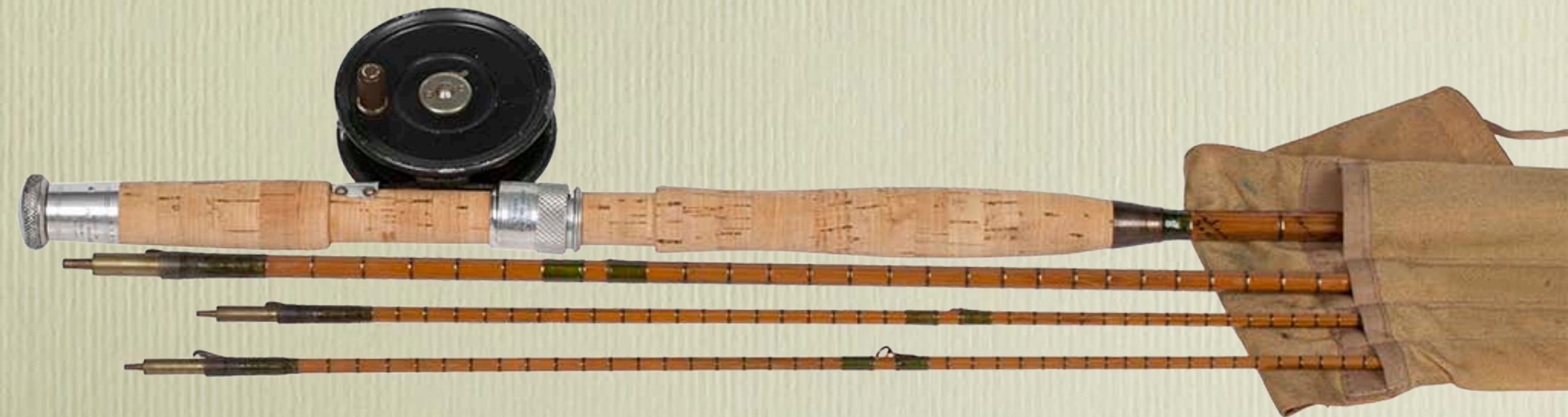
This was a great event indeed. An epoch in the history of fishing rod making in this country. In 1925 their original invention by the introduction of rods of manufacture.



# 1928

Hardy-Marston rod - a good example of how the company relaunched lines - the Marston was first built in 1885 and continually improved

This is a 10 foot 4 inch rod, the reel dates to the 50s





# 1930

LRH dry fly rod sold from 1928-1971

This example probably dates to 1930





# 1932

J.J. Hardy dies

An era has ended

His legacy includes the  
perfect angler's pipe





# 1934

10 foot Deluxe rod built from 1915-1957

Note the almost round section and the repair...

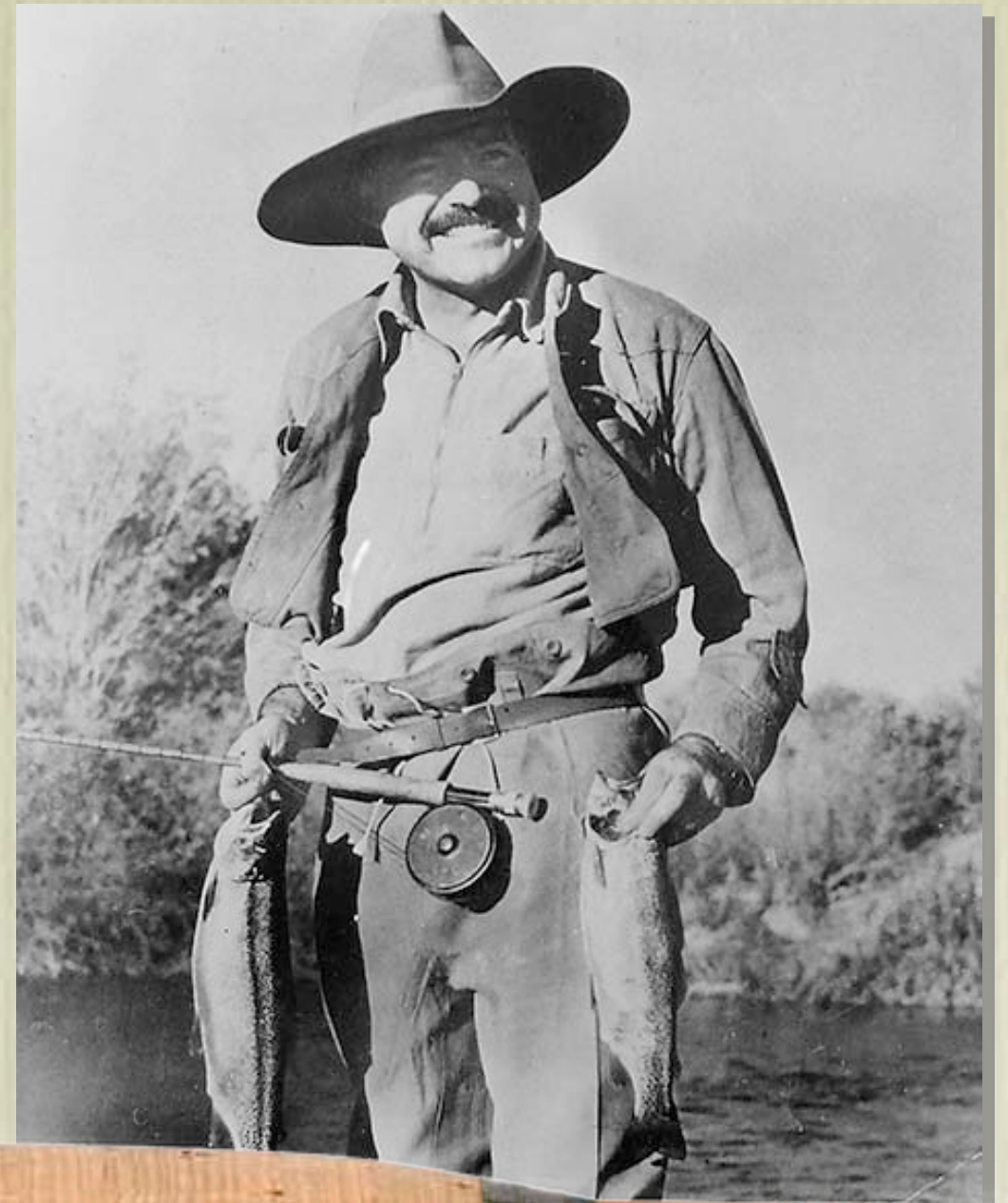




# 1939

Ernest Hemingway 's  
favourite rod was a Hardy  
Fairy

Production 1903-1956





# 1956

William F Hardy  
becomes joint  
managing director with  
L.R.

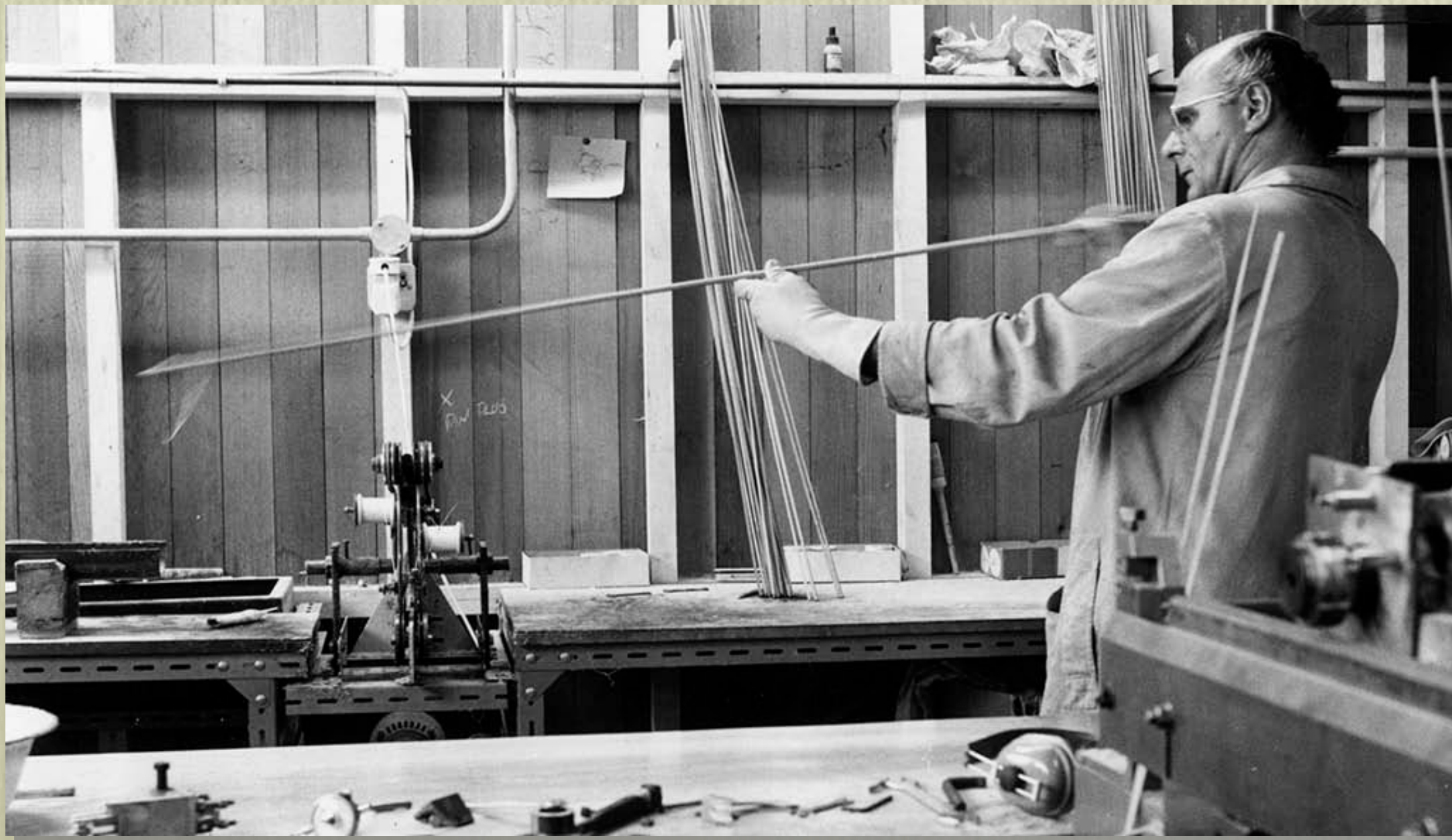
L.R. dies two years  
later





# 1960

## Hollolite fly rod range introduced





# 1961

Fibreglass rods  
introduced -  
reluctantly

Hardy 's continue  
to build split  
bamboo rods in  
quantity

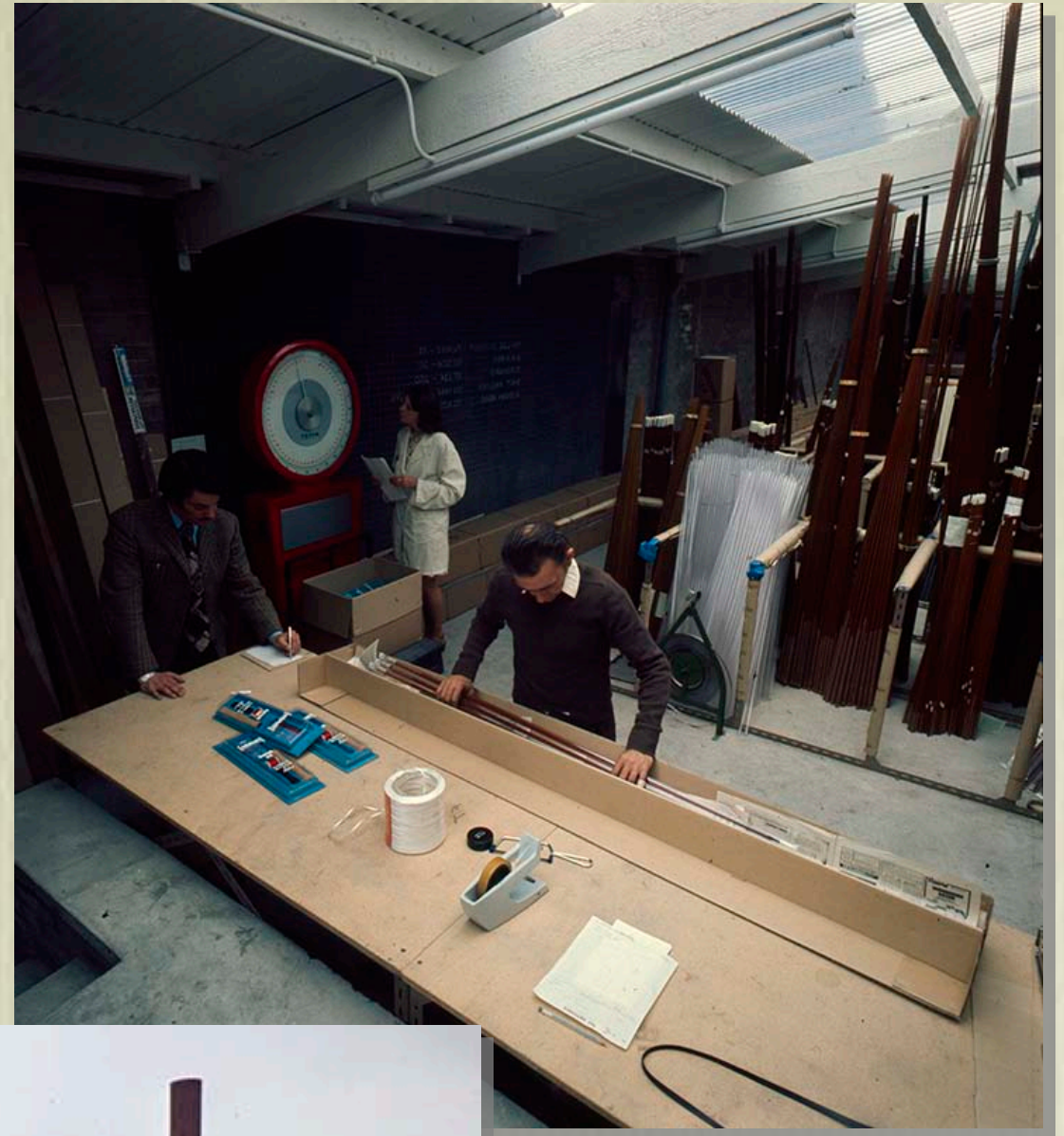




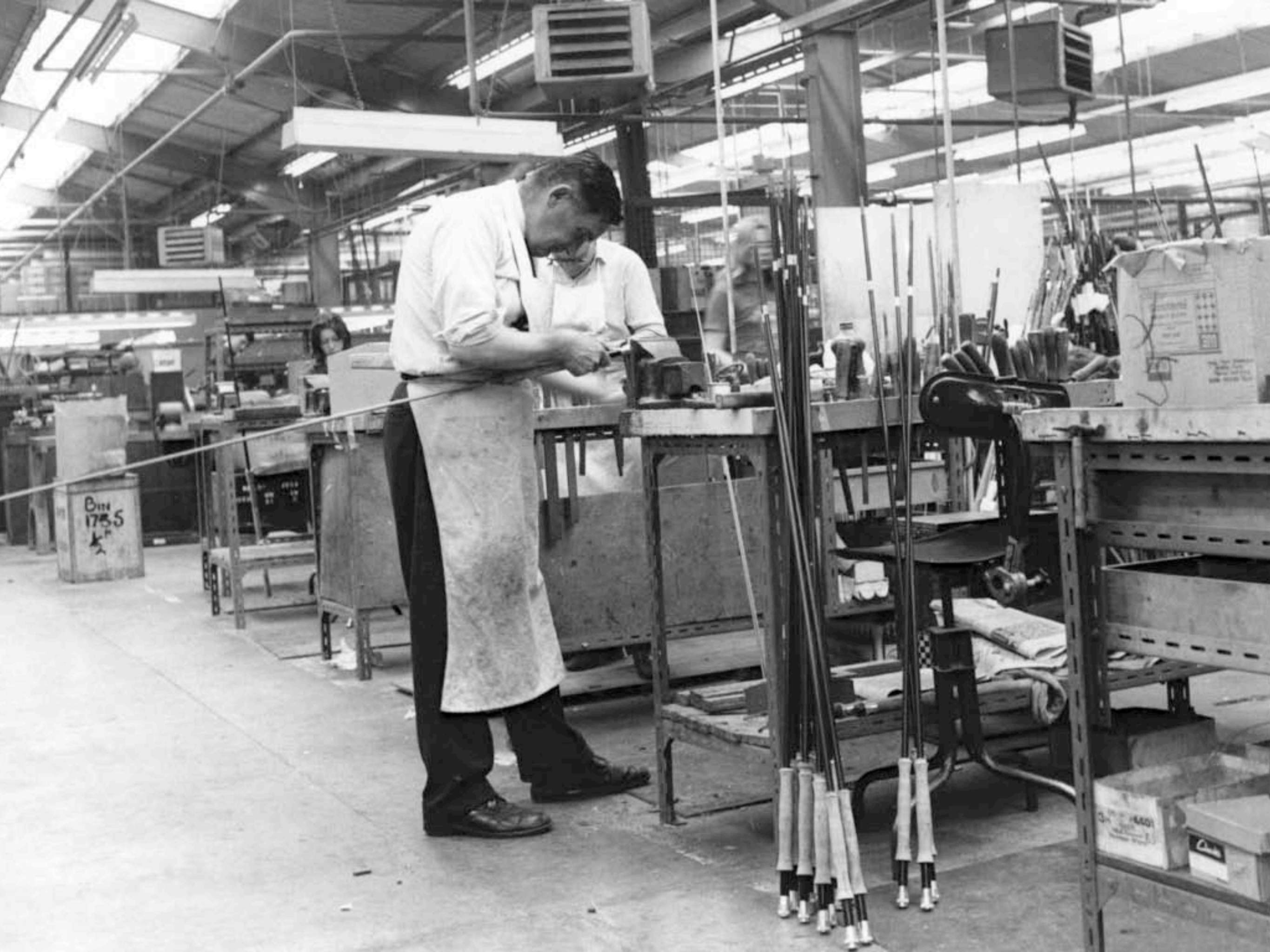
# 1965

Willowburn factory opened

A new era has dawned, but  
some things are still in  
black and white...









# 1967

Cash flow crisis occurs

Hardy 's sold to Harris & Sheldon

Hollolite fly rod discontinued

Gold Medal rods discontinued after 84 years of production



# 1971

Perfection series of split bamboo rods dropped after 88 years of production

Hardy 's take out a patent on carbon fibre rods, but spend so long in development that they lose any commercial advantage





# 1976

Carbon fibre rods  
introduced...

...but somehow, the  
flame does not die and  
Hardy's continue to  
build split bamboo  
rods





